

Strategic Plan for the Use and Enjoyment of the Charles River in Waltham



Yaeger Communications Summer, 2002

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I. A Vision of the Charles River in Waltham

It is a summer weekend morning in a year not too distant, and the Charles River in Waltham is glittering with the day's first sunlight. A father and his two children clamber down the bank, rods in hand, whispering excitedly about the whopper they're sure to catch. Next weekend is Waltham's annual Charles River Fishing Tournament, and the kids want to try out their new "secret bait." They see another fisherman readying his boat at the Woerd Avenue Boat Launch, but they're all alone for now, except for a heron stalking the shore for its breakfast.

Near the Moody Street Bridge, a dozen magnificent sailing vessels ply the waters. Historic racing yachts, proud fishing schooners, even a 21-gun warship tack from bank to bank in a splendid parade of sail. Their pilots? They're perched on shore, assiduously navigating their miniature craft with radio controls. It's a multigenerational bunch, from schoolchildren to grandparents, all members of the Waltham Model Boating Club which stages lilliputian regattas each weekend.

Canoes, kayaks, rowboats, and paddleboats are beginning to dot the horizon. The new Waltham Public Boathouse will be doing a brisk business today, renting to residents and folks from throughout suburban Boston with scenic recreation that rivals that along the famed Boston Esplanade. The scene is reminiscent of a hundred years ago, when hundreds of canoes meandered lazily through the Lakes District with Waltham's factory workers at leisure. In the intervening years the Charles River became increasingly polluted until no one dared dip a paddle in the water, much less swim. Today, however, dedicated "stream teams" keep the Charles free of debris, and strict monitoring by the Charles River Watershed Association ensures water quality. Next week's Charles River Triathlon is testament to a new generation of recreation: more than 200 athletes will cycle along the Riverwalk, run a marathon and, yes, swim through the Lakes District to the Moody Street Bridge.

Waltham is proud of what its river has become, and nowhere is that pride manifested more visibly than in the Waltham Living Water Garden Park. The park combines art and science to promote new ways of understanding water's place in the global ecosystem. Today, two youth groups and several neighborhood families are traversing boardwalks and playing on sculptures as they observe how nature cleans water with settling ponds and wetlands. Modeled after a similar park in China, Waltham's Living Water Garden attracts hundreds of people a year with its unique beauty and educational experience.

At the City Dock near Moody Street, the 50-passenger steamer *White Swan* prepares for the first of its narrated cruises to the Lakes District. The *White Swan* is the replica of a vessel that toured the Charles a century before, and today the boat is more popular than ever. A group tour of seniors from Worcester

proceeds up the gangway, followed by a stream of families and couples looking forward to a relaxing journey.

In one of Waltham's outdoor cafés beside the river, a couple from New York enjoys breakfast and plans their day. They are alumni of Waltham's colleges and, as they scour their brochures and maps, they remark how the city has changed since their student days. Back then, the city seemed to turn its back on the Charles. Now, the river serves as a scenic focal point for restaurants, quaint boutiques, and other attractions.

Several groups of cyclists pass along the MDC Riverwalk on their way to Boston. Hundreds of people each day enjoy the scenic recreation path for walking, cycling, rollerblading, and family outings. Right now, a group of birdwatchers has binoculars trained on a parade of ducklings along the riverbank, while a family pauses to read one of the Riverwalk's interpretive markers. This one describes the world-famous Waltham Watch Company factory and the old Nutting's-on-the-Charles ballroom.

Inside the Charles River Museum of Industry, knots of out-of-town tourists view an intriguing exhibit on the use of water power along the Charles River through history. A costumed interpreter portraying Francis Cabot Lowell, one of the founders of America's industrial revolution, interacts with the crowd by regaling them with tales of his Boston Manufacturing Company, whose 1814 building the Museum now occupies.

The Museum is an official MDC Riverwalk visitor information center and, as such, offers an orientation video, interpretive exhibits, and literature to those using the Riverwalk. During the school year, field trips use the Museum as their point of departure for ecology and history education programs. A cyclist asks where she can get her tire repaired. The Museum's information "ambassador" directs her to the Waltham Bike Shop nearby on Moody Street.

In the middle of the river just upstream from Moody Street Bridge, six floating platforms are lashed together and anchored. Carpenters are busy erecting lavish sets for tonight's "Waltham Floating Stage" production of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Waltham's "Floating Stage" performances have gained international attention for their unusual and compelling theatrical experiences. During a performance, the action takes place on the floating stage, on the banks, and aboard festively-decorated water craft shuttling the actors back and forth. Spectators watch from the banks of the Riverwalk, the City Dock, the terraces of Cronin's Landing, and from boats anchored upstream. Since their inception two years ago, the unique events have brought Waltham positive publicity and attendance similar to the "Waterfire" performances in Providence.

The “Waltham Floating Stage” and special events along the river have become one of Waltham’s “signatures,” a significant point of pride for the city’s residents. During the course of the year, the city hosts a small concert series in Riverwalk Park, Landry Park, and Cronin’s Landing. On Saturday nights, the roof deck of the Embassy Parking Lot, overlooking the falls at Moody Street Dam, is transformed into a romantic dance venue. And taking a cue from the popularity of the “Floating Stage” events, the city this summer has started Wednesday night “Paddle-In Movies,” cinema classics shown on an outdoor screen near the Prospect Street Bridge. Boaters watch from the comfort of their canoe or kayak, and landlubbers are welcome to view from the banks.

Next weekend, Waltham will brace itself for the city’s largest event, the third annual Waltham Ethnic Heritage Festival. The Festival is a 2-day, city-wide event that attracts upwards of 75,000 visitors and celebrates the city’s vibrant ethnic history. Much of the action takes place along the river, where ethnic food vendors serve eclectic cuisine and musicians play along the Riverwalk. This year’s lineup includes performances by Cambodian dancers, Acadian fiddlers, a Swedish storyteller, a Latino percussion band, Italian singers, and other performers representing each of Waltham’s ethnic heritages.

The Charles River in Waltham has certainly undergone changes through its history. Four hundred years ago it was wild and untamed. Then it helped give birth to the American industrial revolution. In time, it became a polluted pariah that many thought was beyond redemption. Today, the river has entered a new era. People care about the river again, both as a natural resource and a recreational gem. In the history of the Charles River, this may be the best of times.

II. INTRODUCTION

The following strategic plan to encourage awareness and use of the Charles River in Waltham has been prepared by Yaeger Communications for the City of Waltham, Planning Department, through a grant from the Riverways Programs of the Massachusetts Department of Fisheries, Wildlife, and Environmental Law Enforcement.

The goals and objectives for the strategic plan include:

- Encourage use and stewardship of the Charles River and riverwalks through community-wide special event programming, recreation, and opportunities for volunteer participation.

- Enhance appreciation of the historical, social, and environmental contribution of the Charles River to the City of Waltham.
- Identify federal, state, and city entities that have jurisdiction over the river and their respective responsibilities, liabilities, concerns, and approval procedures to implement specific recommendations.
- Raise public awareness of issues surrounding the Charles River today, including water quality, greenspace protection, cleanup, and recreation.
- Coordinate activities along the Charles River with the City's efforts to revitalize the downtown and to link the downtown with the rest of the city.
- Enhance the quality of life for Waltham's residents and visitors.

The purpose of the strategic plan is not to catalogue the river's resources nor analyze its current environmental status. Rather, our intent is to create viable programmatic ideas for meeting the objectives above, to make the resource more accessible and more appreciated, while at the same time maintaining a balance between recreation and the health of the river itself.

The methodology for the strategic plan is centered on two community "charrette" meetings, held on June 10 and June 18, 2002 at the Charles River Museum of Industry. At the charrettes, community leaders and interested citizens provided ideas and input for a vision for the Charles River in Waltham. For the strategic plan, we have refined the ideas gathered at the charrettes, and have supplemented the information gathered there with additional one-on-one interviews and research of secondary sources.

The result is hopefully one which encourages the community to action and provides a blueprint for creating new ways of experiencing and appreciating the Charles River in Waltham. We also hope it is a springboard for further ideas. Strategic plans, in our view, are not documents cast in stone. They should be fluid processes, frameworks for discussion that can be modified to meet future needs and situations. We are pleased to have had the opportunity to work with the Waltham community at this important juncture of history, and we hope our work together will continue to bear fruit for many years to come.

Yaeger Communications
Summer, 2002

III. HISTORY OF THE CHARLES RIVER IN WALTHAM

The history of Waltham is intertwined with the Charles River. Prior to its “discovery” by Europeans in the 1600s, Native Americans used the river for transportation and sustenance. The Algonquins called the river “Quinobequin,” meaning “twisted” or “winding.”

European settlement of Waltham (then part of Watertown in the Saltonstall Plantation) began in the 1630s, as the western edge of the Puritans’ Massachusetts Bay Colony. For about a hundred years, the community was principally agricultural. Then, in the mid-1700s, small industries began to spring up along the Charles River. The first dam was constructed in 1788 (at the site of the current Moody Street Dam) to power the Boies paper mill, followed by seven more in the coming years to power a variety of industries including grist mills, textile operations, and iron manufacturing.

In 1814, Francis Cabot Lowell perfected America’s first power loom in his Waltham cotton textile plant on the banks of the Charles. The original factory buildings of his Boston Manufacturing Company still stand on Moody Street, used as elderly housing, the Charles River Museum of Industry, and the Charles River Public Internet Center. Lowell’s innovations (including the use of single women as his work force) are widely credited to giving birth to the American industrial revolution, which was to transform Massachusetts into the nation’s greatest manufacturing center.

In 1854 Aaron Dennison formed the Waltham Watch Company along the Charles River; the company perfected the process of mass production as it produced more than 40 million watches during 100 years of operation. Waltham continues to be known internationally as “The Watch City.”

During the 19th century, the Charles River was a vital recreational asset for the citizens of Waltham. Factory workers generally had one day off per week, and had limited means of spending their precious leisure time far beyond the city limits. Fishing, swimming, picnicking, and boating were all popular activities. Several boat houses were constructed along the river on Moody Street, Crescent Street, and Woerd Avenue, renting out hundreds of canoes and rowboats. Beginning in 1873, small steamboats took passengers on river tours and to Forest Grove and Norumbega Park, noted amusement parks located on the Charles in Waltham and nearby Newton.

The river at this point was the lifeblood of the community. As the locus of manufacturing, it was the source of income for much of the town. After work, it was the source of recreation, a cultural resource as well as an economic and natural one.

At the beginning of the 20th century, however, Waltham's industry, along with that throughout New England, began to decline. The Boston Manufacturing Company, which at its peak employed 1,900 workers, ceased operations in 1929. The Waltham Watch Company, which employed 3,000, closed its doors in 1954.

In their wake, the Charles River was left polluted, blighted, and largely forgotten. However, over the past 30 years massive cleanup, infrastructure improvement, and community policing efforts, spearheaded by the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC, a state agency), Massachusetts Water Resource Authority, Charles River Watershed Association, and City of Waltham, have made excellent progress in improving the Charles' ecological health. Between the late 1960s and 1985, the MDC estimates that it and other entities invested approximately \$100 million on pollution abatement. In Waltham, the Charles is now categorized as "Class B" water, which according to Environmental Protection Agency guidelines supports recreational activities such as fishing and boating.

Now, Waltham is beginning to focus on restoring the Charles River as a central component in the life of the community. In 1997, the Boulder Company, Inc., redeveloped the Grover Cronin department store into a multi-use condominium and retail complex facing the river at Moody and Crescent Streets. The development, now operated by Archstone Properties, marks the first time in recent memory that new construction actually took advantage of the river as a scenic asset.

The City and the MDC have invested heavily to improve access and encourage recreation along the river with construction of a handsome Riverwalk, building greenspace, and other riparian improvements. The City is completing an attractive walkway and dock at Cronin's Landing near Moody Street. The MDC is implementing its ambitious 1998 Upper Charles River Reservation Master Plan, investing more than \$8 million to create new access points to the river, build recreational facilities such as the Woerd Avenue Boat Launch and scenic overlooks, visitor centers, informational signage and markers and, most important, link Waltham and Boston with a continuous, 15 - mile Riverwalk that forms a linear greenway system.

These improvements to water quality and recreational opportunities, in our opinion, are the most important thing to happen to the Charles River in Waltham since Lowell built his factory. On a practical

level, they will allow thousands of people unprecedented access to the river and all it offers. On a symbolic level, they illustrate a new mindset about the Charles. No longer is it something to be polluted, shunned, and despised. The Charles River is once again taking center stage in the community life of Waltham.

IV. ISSUES

In the community charrette meetings for this strategic plan, the group generally felt that the Charles River has made significant strides toward becoming a viable recreational resource, but much remains to be done. The group identified the following issues which need to be addressed before the river is brought up to optimal environmental and recreational standards.

A. Environmental Issues

1. Pollution

Tough environmental laws, diligent cleanup efforts, and a dwindling industrial presence in Waltham have contributed to a much cleaner Charles River than that 30 years ago. According to the Charles River Watershed Association, water quality is very good during dry weather conditions, earning an EPA rating of “B” (compared to a “D” rating in 1995). Overall, the river in 2001 “met the boating standard 87 percent of the time and the swimming standard 69 percent of the time,” according to the CRWA. “This compares favorably with 1995 when boating standards were met just 39 percent of the time and swimming standards just 19 percent of the time.” The goal set by the EPA and shared by other agencies is to have the Charles River fully swimmable and fishable by 2005.

Wet weather periods, however, continue to challenge the water quality of the Charles in Waltham. Stormwater pollutants in the form of oil, grease, gasoline, pet waste, fertilizers, pesticides, street trash, sand, and other detritus of urban living wash directly or indirectly into the river in heavy rains. The CRWA issues daily water quality advisories to describe conditions in various sections of the river. The river’s health and water-based recreation continue to be impacted by this type of “non-point” pollution. Long-term solutions include “capping” former industrial sites and retired landfills to prevent hazardous chemicals from leaching into the river, an expensive proposition. Less expensive remedies

include improved public awareness about proper disposal of household cleaners, paints, oil, and other materials potentially damaging to the river's ecosystem.

The Cities of Waltham and Newton both have closed landfills near the Cram's Cove area of the Charles. The Waltham landfill was built in the 1930s and retired in 1971.

2. Open Space Issues

Massachusetts is currently losing open space at the rate of 44 acres per day, according to state sources cited in the *Boston Globe*. Many communities, including Waltham, have begun the process of open space planning and acquisition. Waltham's open space plan, written in 1994 and updated in 2000, recognizes the Charles River as "the most valuable natural resource in Waltham," and includes recommendations for improving access and recreation along the Charles. Several of the recommendations in the most recent report have been or are being accomplished, namely the city's construction of the public riverwalk near Cronin's Landing and on-going construction of the city dock. However, we encourage the city to actively identify land parcels along the Charles, either publicly or privately owned, to add to the city's open space/recreational use mix as they become available. Several of the ideas discussed later in this plan recommend a "recreation hub," which would be an excellent use for city-acquired land.

3. Invasive Plants

Many waterways and wetlands in the Commonwealth are choked with invasive non-native species such as purple loosestrife and Eurasian milfoil, threatening the natural ecosystem of the watershed. In the Charles River, the threat of invasive plants is always present. The Waltham stretch of the river has been plagued in the past with water chestnuts and other weeds, especially in the Lakes District, but the MDC's aggressive maintenance program has them largely under control. (The MDC reports that several years ago almost half of the 190-acre water sheet in the Lakes District was infested with water chestnuts.) We recommend continued vigilance toward controlling non-native plants, as they can have a negative long-term impact on the health and recreational enjoyment of the Charles.

4. Maintenance/Security

The Metropolitan District Commission has statutory jurisdiction over the waters of the Charles River in Waltham, plus MDC-owned property. The agency's maintenance crew is responsible for weed and litter control, park maintenance, and maintenance of the Upper Charles River Reservation. Moreover,

according to the MDC's Master Plan, park rangers will eventually patrol the Reservation on bicycle and lead walking tours for added security.

Several other agencies, however, are involved in upkeep and security along the river, including the Massachusetts Riverways Programs (which oversees volunteer "Stream Teams" and the Charles River Watershed Team), the Charles River Watershed Association (which monitors water quality and is the river's chief non-profit advocate), and the Waltham Police Department (which patrols the Riverwalk on mountain bikes).

With so many agencies having direct or peripheral responsibility for the health and safety of the Charles River, it is easy to see how the public could become confused about who is accountable for what. It is our hope that this strategic plan will create a framework for dialogue between agencies, to streamline communication, and to maximize their overall effectiveness.

It is interesting to note that, in our public charrette meetings, security along the Riverwalk did not emerge as a major issue. In its master plan, the MDC reports that "it has been demonstrated that visitor safety improves with increased use of a facility... Thus, as the new Reservation is improved, its popularity spreads and use and surveillance increases, it will actually become safer..." This observation has been generally borne out in actual practice. Aside from a few isolated incidents, police report relatively few crimes or nuisances along the Riverwalk.

B. Preservation Issues

Waltham is a historic town with many historical structures still surviving. The City Planning Department, and groups such as the Waltham Historical Commission and Historic Waltham, Inc., have been instrumental in providing a vision for historic preservation within the community. Moody Street, for example, in the 1990s underwent improvements that seek to reclaim the retail zone's historic flavor: period-style street lamps, sidewalks, and trash receptacles have been installed over the past few years. Historically significant buildings such as the Boston Manufacturing Company and Waltham Watch Company factories have seen adaptive reuse as housing, museum, offices, and public computer facility.

We encourage the city to consider the Charles River as a historic resource and one that deserves preservation. Although a river is a living ecosystem and not a built structure, the Charles (and the historic structures contiguous to it) is of such value to the city's past, present, and future that it warrants special designation as an historic landmark or district. If the public mindset begins to treasure the river in this manner, the Charles will become a central asset in Waltham's cultural legacy.

C. Recreation Issues

1. Access

According to the 2000 City of Waltham Open Space & Recreation Plan, “questionnaires and surveys indicate a strong need to provide better access to the Charles River for public enjoyment.” Additional physical and visual access to the river is of major importance in making the Charles a better-used resource.

Access: MDC

The first goal of the MDC’s 1998 Upper Charles River Reservation Master Plan is to “improve access to the river and/or greenway for walkers, hikers, boats, canoes, bicycles, anglers, and the physically challenged.” In Waltham, the MDC’s vision focuses on creating a 6-mile continuous Riverwalk on the banks of the Charles, and linking the Waltham section with the existing Riverwalk sections downstream in Watertown, Cambridge, and Boston.

As it has implemented the master plan, the MDC has dramatically increased the number of access points along the river in Waltham. To date, the MDC has:

- Constructed a small park and interpretive signage at the Bleachery Dam and Sluiceway
- Construction or complete renovation of 12 river access points
- Reclaimed MDC-owned property abutting the river from private encroachments
- Obtained easements from private property owners to link publicly-owned river frontage into a 15-mile continuous Riverwalk from Boston
- Installed handsome granite entry markers and interpretive signage at points along the Riverwalk

- Developed Riverwalk Park on the north bank of the Charles between Prospect Street and Moody Street in 1991; this area offers key visual access to a beautiful, sweeping stretch of the river

The MDC continues to work on the following elements of its master plan:

- Renovation of the Woerd Avenue Boat Launch, the only launching facility for motorboats in the Lakes District (work scheduled to begin 2002)
- Creation of a new riparian greenway between the Waltham Watch factory and the Woerd Avenue Boat Launch
- Creation of a new one-mile Riverwalk link between Bridge Street in Newton and Farwell Street in Waltham
- Cantilevered Riverwalk beside the Charles River Museum of Industry to link the Elm Street Bridge, Landry Park, and Moody Street Bridge
- Development of a visitor center at the Charles River Museum of Industry
- Improvements of Landry Park, located beside the 1814 Boston Manufacturing Company mill complex, overlooking the Moody Street Dam and fish ladder
- Viewing platforms at the Newton Street Bridge
- Addition of granite entrance pillars to all Riverwalk points as they intersect with sidewalks and roads (the City of Waltham installed some of the pillars)
- Encourage improvements to the city-owned Waltham Pumping Station Site as a picnic site and canoe landing
- Easements from Brandeis University and the City of Waltham/Mount Feake Cemetery for continuous public access on the river's north bank

The MDC has \$3.5 million in funding in place for these projects. They are due to begin late fall, 2002 and should be completed in the spring of 2004.

As we commented above, the MDC's master plan development is one of the most important things ever to happen to the Charles River in Waltham. However, public knowledge of the plans and accomplishments is spotty, if we are to judge from reactions at our charrette meetings. The MDC should better publicize its on-going efforts. As the master plan nears completion, we recommend creation of a comprehensive "Charles River Recreation Guidebook" (for Waltham and/or the entire Upper Charles River Reservation) to make sure the public is fully aware of the new public access to the resource.

The MDC's Connors Pool, located at the corner of Newton and River Streets, has been a favorite local recreational facility for many years. The facility is currently closed, due to lack of MDC operational funding.

Access: City of Waltham

Using a federal transportation grant, the City of Waltham in 2000 began work on a handsome brick and granite walkway adjacent to Cronin's Landing at the Moody Street Bridge. The work, due to be completed in 2003, includes viewing areas with benches, landscaping, and a handicapped-accessible public boat dock which will replace an antiquated MDC-owned dock.

Completion of the city project will provide a major infrastructural improvement to the area, allowing access to the river for pedestrians and cyclists on the south bank, and will provide a docking facility for boats.

The city's Mt. Feake Cemetery property is a beautiful asset along the Charles River's north bank. It offers acres of unsurpassed solitude, river views, and natural beauty; area residents and employees use it today for walking, jogging, exploring the historic headstones, and quiet reflection. In its master plan, the MDC identifies Mt. Feake Cemetery as a critical part of its vision for a continuous Riverwalk experience on the north bank (currently the Riverwalk on the north side terminates at the Prospect Street Bridge). The master plan also calls for a canoe landing and picnic grounds at the site of the former Waltham Pumping Station, located on the cemetery's western flank. Although public access is tolerated during daylight hours, signs at the cemetery entrance state clearly that the property is not part of the Riverwalk. A city ordinance currently restricts use of the cemetery from recreational purposes.

2. Public Awareness

As improvements to the Charles River are underway, it is essential that the public be kept informed about safety, water quality, and recreational opportunities. Unfortunately, after years of

pollution and neglect, public perception of the river may continue to be negative for some time to come. The CRWA, MDC, City of Waltham, and other Charles River stakeholders must redouble their publicity efforts as river improvements near completion, spreading the message that the Charles is clean, safe, and a recreational treasure. As public awareness grows, both within and outside Waltham, the river's constituency will grow, expanding the number of people enjoying the resource and caring for it.

D. Economic Development Issues

One of the goals of this strategic plan is to enhance the quality of life for Waltham's residents. The city's economic development is one way to measure quality of life, and we feel that additional recreation along the Charles River will definitely aid the community's economic fortunes.

Opening up the Riverwalk to connect Waltham to Boston provides the means of attracting hundreds if not thousands of out-of-town walking and cycling visitors a year. Instituting special events and new recreational ideas (listed later in this plan) will attract thousands of out-of-town visitors arriving by car or train. As awareness grows of the Charles River as a recreational and cultural treasure, overnight visitors will be encouraged to stay and extend their stays in Waltham's hotels.

In order to take full economic advantage of these new visitors, the city must offer them places in which to spend money. Later in this plan, we make recommendations about siting additional restaurants, retail shops, and recreation support (i.e., boat and bike rental, sports shops, fishing outfitters) near the river to provide businesses with sales revenues and employment, and the city with direct revenues from property and hotel tax collections.

Any economic development strategy, however, must fully respect the integrity of the Charles River as an ecological and cultural resource. Ideally, development of new commercial establishments would give first priority to adaptive reuse of historic structures proximate to the river before new construction is considered. Development along the river should fit the natural and historic aesthetic, and should enhance the river's beauty and recreational potential.

We recommend the City target certain areas on or near the river (i.e., the Moody Street Bridge area) as "special development zones." In 1990 the City created a "Riverfront Overlay District," which adopts zoning language and site plan criteria that ensure the river's integrity; the planning department tells us that, to date, no permits have been pulled using the Overlay District regulations. The regulations

should be reviewed and, if they continue to fit the community's goals for environmentally-responsible development along the Charles, the Overlay District should be given better promotion.

As use and positive awareness of the Charles River in Waltham continues to grow, the river will become more and more a "competitive advantage" for the city. Property values, especially along the river, will increase. The city will become more desirable for both potential new residents and businesses. The local economy and, more important, local quality of life, stand to benefit immensely in the future.

E. Stakeholders

The community charrette meetings identified stakeholders that are impacted by this strategic planning process and will be impacted by any action taken on issues relating to the Charles River.

- The Charles River ecosystem (animals, fish, plants, water)
- Waltham residents
- Waltham employees
- Waltham visitors
- Waltham government
- Charles River abutters
- Waltham college students & staff
- Conservationists
- Canoeists/kayakers/motorboaters
- Cyclists
- Anglers
- Legislators and government agencies (federal & state)
- Waltham businesses
- Communities upstream and downstream of Waltham on the Charles
- Developers
- Historians
- Artists
- Health enthusiasts
- Community groups like scouts
- Faith groups
- Educators/students

V. IDEAS

In this section we explore ideas to improve use and awareness of the Charles River in Waltham. The ideas are broken out into three categories: infrastructure, recreation, and events. For each idea, we suggest a course of action for implementation. As identified in the public charrette meetings, top priority ideas are marked with a double asterisk (**).

A. Infrastructure Ideas

If Waltham is to make the most of the Charles River, the community needs to further develop the infrastructure proximate to the river. Nature has provided the resource; now it is up to Waltham to invest in ways that will attract residents and visitors, and encourage them to use it.

1. Boating Outfitter**

In our estimation, the Upper Charles River Reservation, especially the run between the Lakes District and Moody Street Bridge, offers an unparalleled boating experience and opportunity for Waltham. The river here is scenic, natural, and historic. Compared to the stretch in Cambridge and Boston, the Waltham section of the Charles is fairly traffic-free; the resource can handle a fairly sizable increase in recreational boaters before the limits of comfort are reached.

The Upper Charles River Reservation especially lends itself to non-motorized boating. There is only one boat launch (Woerd Avenue) in the Lakes District, and the amount of navigable water available to motorized vessels downstream of the Lakes District is severely limited until Galen Street in Watertown. The height of the Prospect Street Bridge allows only small craft to pass, and numerous dams in Waltham, Newton, and Watertown prevent motorboats from traveling downstream very far. Canoes and kayaks, however, can make a through-trip to Boston using portages.

Currently one canoe/kayak outfitter serves the Upper Charles River Reservation. Located in Newton in the historic MDC Police boathouse, Charles River Canoe & Kayak serves approximately 20,000 paddlers a year with rentals and tour services.

We recommend that Waltham encourage an outfitter to locate in the city, preferably near the Moody Street Bridge. This location would take advantage of several things:

- Proximity to the Waltham commuter rail station, which would allow visitors from Boston (and points west) to arrive by train and rent a boat for an adventure on the Charles River
- Proximity to the Riverwalk, which would allow a visitor to arrive from Boston via bicycle or foot and rent a boat
- Proximity to Moody Street and downtown Waltham, which would allow boaters to eat at one of the city's many restaurants and shop
- Proximity to the Riverwalk Information Center at the Charles River Museum of Industry
- Allow boaters the choice of the Lakes District experience upstream or the more physically demanding portage route downstream
- Convenient and affordable parking at the Embassy parking lot

In addition to canoes and kayaks, we recommend the outfitter offer paddleboats and/or small electric boats for use in the areas upstream of Moody Street. These types of craft are novel and conceivably more popular, as they require less skill to operate. Care must be taken, however, to keep novice boaters at a safe distance from the Moody Street dam.

Action Steps:

- ✂ Determine scope of project (canoes/kayaks/rowboats only? paddleboats/electric boats? livery service to be offered?)
- ✂ Identify possible locations for outfitter operations (preferably near Moody Street Bridge, with proper caution for the nearby dam)
- ✂ Negotiate operational easement and/or rent with property owner
- ✂ Solicit proposals from outfitters
- ✂ Negotiate contract between outfitter and property owner
- ✂ Obtain necessary permits and approvals from City of Waltham and MDC
- ✂ Begin and promote operations

2. Bicycle Rental/Service**

With the completion of the Riverwalk through to Boston, there is a need for a bicycle rental and service establishment in Waltham near the Riverwalk. The Riverwalk could become an attraction for the estimated 475,000 annual guests in the city's hotels, and a bicycle rental (as well as the boat rental mentioned above) would allow these guests a means of recreation along the Charles River. The bike rental should also provide service to cyclists along the Riverwalk riding their own bicycles.

We recommend that, like the boating outfitter, the bike rental establishment should be located along the Riverwalk near the Moody Street Bridge. The same advantages vis a vis proximity to downtown attractions and parking apply. It would be advantageous if the bike rental and boating outfitter were located under the same roof, creating a "recreation hub" in downtown Waltham.

Action Steps:

- ✂ Determine scope of project; identify possible locations for bike rental operations (preferably near Moody Street Bridge)
- ✂ Negotiate operational easement and/or rent with property owner
- ✂ Solicit proposals from entrepreneurs
- ✂ Negotiate contract between entrepreneur and property owner
- ✂ Obtain necessary permits and approvals
- ✂ Begin and promote operations

3. Fishing Outfitter

Waltham currently has one bait & tackle shop, on Main Street a considerable distance from the Charles River. Ideally, this business would be located in or near the "recreation hub" along with the boat and bike rental, proximate to the Charles River. Again, the advantages of such a central arrangement in downtown Waltham are numerous.

Action Steps:

- ✂ Identify possible locations for fishing outfitter operations (preferably near Moody Street Bridge in a "recreation hub" with boat and bike rental)
- ✂ Negotiate operational easement and/or rent with property owner
- ✂ Solicit proposals from entrepreneurs
- ✂ Negotiate contract between entrepreneur and property owner
- ✂ Obtain necessary permits and approvals

☞ Begin and promote operations

4. Public Art

Public art can be a meaningful enhancement to open spaces, and can add to a destination's attractiveness to residents and visitors. We believe Waltham could benefit from the following ideas for public art along the Charles River. In order to prioritize and facilitate these projects, we recommend creation of a "Waltham Public Art Committee," consisting of Waltham area artists, plus art department representatives from Waltham's Brandeis University, Bentley College, and Waltham High School. The committee would develop a "master plan" for public art in Waltham, create an artwork selection process, and oversee the installation of the works.

- Alewife sculpture**: the art department at Waltham High School has proposed creating a fanciful metal sculpture of alewife, to be located on the catwalk on the Moody Street dam. The sculpture would be colorful and kinetic, spanning the width of the dam with brightly painted fish that move with the breezes, mimicking the seasonal actions of real alewife in the fish ladder located at the dam. The alewife sculpture would be viewed from Landry Park, from the Embassy parking lot area, and from the Moody Street Bridge. Cooperation with the MDC (stewards of Landry Park and Moody Street dam) would be required for this project.
- Riverwalk Park art: the long, sinuous pathways of Riverwalk Park lend themselves to a presentation of sculpture, placed in strategic locations between the Moody Street Bridge and Prospect Street Bridge on the north side of the river. Naturalistic shapes and materials would be preferable, in keeping with the natural setting of the Riverwalk itself. Cooperation of the MDC, stewards of Riverwalk Park, would be required for this project.
- MDC Testing Laboratory: in its Upper Charles River Master Plan, the MDC proposes a "playful mural" painted on the wall of its testing laboratory, located on the Riverwalk near Newton Street. The mural, according to the master plan, will depict "special wildlife and plants found along the river."
- Francis Cabot Lowell statue: we recommend creation of a statue in commemoration of Francis Cabot Lowell and his factory workers, to be located in Landry Park on the

site of the original Boston Manufacturing Company. The work could be commissioned through the “public art committee” mentioned above, targeting artists from Waltham and the Greater Boston area. Cooperation of the MDC, stewards of Landry Park, would be required for this project.

- “Workers at Play” sculpture: we recommend creation of a sculpture, located in the Charles River itself (perhaps near Forest Grove Park), depicting 19th-century factory workers at play in the river (in canoes, swimming, etc.). The work could be commissioned through the “public art committee” mentioned above, targeting artists from Waltham and the Greater Boston area. Cooperation of the MDC, stewards of the Charles River, would be required for this project.
- Native American sculpture: we recommend creation of a sculpture commemorating early Native American use of the Charles River. Possible sites include the area near Maple Cove, Sandy Hook, or Roberts Bay. The work could be commissioned through the “public art committee” mentioned above, targeting artists from Waltham and the Greater Boston area. Cooperation of the MDC, stewards of the Charles River, would be required for this project.
- “Children at Play” sculpture: we recommend creation of a sculpture interpreting children at play in Waltham through the ages (including Native American, colonial, industrial, and present day). A good site for this might be near the Calvary Street Footbridge and Bleachery Dam park. The work could be commissioned through the “public art committee” mentioned above, targeting artists from Waltham and the Greater Boston area. Cooperation of the MDC, stewards of the Charles River, would be required for this project.

Action Steps:

- ✂ Create “public art committee” from Waltham area artists, plus art department representatives of Brandeis University, Bentley College, and Waltham High School
- ✂ Determine priorities for public art commissions
- ✂ Research grant funding (i.e., Mass. Cultural Council, National Endowment for the Arts, Mass. Humanities Commission); solicit private funding
- ✂ Secure necessary approvals and permits
- ✂ Commission, install, and publicize art

5. Bridge Improvements

The City of Waltham recently improved Moody Street Bridge by replacing the solid concrete bridgewalls with attractive metalwork that allows better views of the Charles River. We recommend similar improvements to the Prospect Street Bridge, along with repair of the sidewalk which is uneven in some spots. The MDC, in its master plan, proposes a viewing platform on the stone abutment of the Newton Street Bridge. The platform would be an attractive stopping place on the Riverwalk and feature interpretive information about the river.

Action Steps:

- ✂ Determine improvements needed
- ✂ Develop scope of work
- ✂ Research funding sources
- ✂ Develop RFP
- ✂ Contract and complete improvements

6. Visitor Services

In order to make the Charles River experience in Waltham as pleasant and meaningful as possible, the city must offer exemplary visitor services.

- Visitor Center: the MDC master plan calls for a visitor center to be located at the Charles River Museum of Industry. This facility should offer visitors the following: information services, literature display, interpretive exhibitry, access to rest rooms. The visitor center might also include a working hydroelectric turbine which generates power for the visitor center and other river-related attractions and activities (i.e., Landry Park, special events, etc.). Several years ago the Franklin Institute suggested the feasibility of a small hydroelectric generator at the Moody Street Dam. This would make an interesting exhibit on alternative energy and water power, and it would serve a useful purpose as well.

An additional visitor center could be established in conjunction with the “recreation hub” idea outlined above, which ideally would be located close to the train station.

- Information kiosks: information kiosks placed strategically along the Riverwalk would be desirable, providing maps (i.e., “you are here”), interpretive information, and visitor information on other attractions, services, and restaurants. Computerized, interactive information kiosks may be the best, if they can fit aesthetically with the look and feel of the Riverwalk.
- Signage: the MDC and the City have installed handsome granite markers at Riverwalk entrances in Waltham, as well as granite interpretive signage at various points. Additionally, the MDC proposes to use “heron’s feet” imprints (similar in concept to the Freedom Trail’s red line) to link sections of the Riverwalk that use city sidewalks. We recommend the City of Waltham and MDC cooperatively develop a signage policy for “trailblazing” signs from major roadways to Riverwalk entrances and parking.
- Rest Rooms**: studies have found that adequate rest room facilities are the most important visitor service a destination can offer. We recommend the City and MDC collaborate on inventory public rest room facilities on or near the Riverwalk, and identify these facilities in signage and informational literature. In sections of the Riverwalk where public rest room facilities are sparse, we suggest seasonal use of portable toilets.

Action Steps:

- ✂ City and MDC collaborate to identify and prioritize visitor services projects
- ✂ Develop scope of work and division of responsibility between City of Waltham and MDC (and other agencies, if any)
- ✂ Research funding sources
- ✂ Develop RFPs
- ✂ Contract and complete visitor services projects

7. Security Measures

As we observed above in the “issues” section, safety and security along the Riverwalk and river will increase as use of the resource increases. Still, we recommend vigilance on the part of the MDC and Waltham Police to patrol the Reservation to maintain the perception of safety.

We also recommend sufficient lighting in areas where public activities occur in the evenings. The Riverwalk itself is closed at night, but suitable lighting should be maintained in Landry Park, at the Charles River Museum of Industry, along the footbridge between Landry Park and the Embassy parking lot, along Moody Street Bridge, Cronin's Landing, and Riverwalk Park. These areas are potentially important special event venues along the Charles, and security should be stressed here.

Secure bicycle and canoe/kayak "parking" should be established near Moody Street Bridge to encourage cyclists and paddlers to tour downtown Waltham. This service could be housed at the "recreation complex" suggested above.

Action Steps:

- ✂ MDC and Waltham Police establish policy for patrolling Riverwalk and river for safety and security; publicize patrols
- ✂ MDC and City of Waltham review lighting requirements for areas targeted for evening special events.
- ✂ MDC and City of Waltham identify site for bicycle and canoe/kayak "parking" area; develop scope of work and division of responsibility between City of Waltham and MDC (and other agencies, if any)
- ✂ Research funding sources
- ✂ Develop RFPs
- ✂ Contract and complete project

8. Living Water Garden Park

An interesting idea emerged in one of our community charrette meetings: the suggestion of creating a "living water garden park" as an attraction along the Charles River. Inspired by a facility created in 1996 in China (see article in Appendix), Waltham's park would be multi-acre, multi-disciplinary, and multi-use, combining art and science to promote new ways of understanding water's place in the global ecosystem. The park would feature giant sculptural and natural elements that form a fully functioning water treatment plan that actually cleans a small portion of the Charles River each day. Park visitors can walk through wetlands and ponds, and play on the sculptures through which the water bubbles and aerates. Similar facilities are in progress in Duluth, Minnesota, and Portland, Oregon, and Great Barrington, Massachusetts.

The Living Water Garden Park might also include demonstration gardens and/or community garden plots. The park would be symbolic of Waltham's new positive attitude toward the Charles River, and would be a lasting attraction for generations of residents and visitors.

Action Steps:

- ✂ Develop "Living Water Garden Park" team, consisting of MDC, City of Waltham, Charles River Watershed Association, Brandeis, Bentley, Waltham High School, Waltham Conservation Commission, Waltham Land Trust, Mass. Riverways Programs, and interested citizens.
- ✂ Team to determine scope and strategy of project, reviewing the success of the China model and elsewhere
- ✂ Research funding sources
- ✂ Develop RFPs
- ✂ Secure necessary approvals and permits
- ✂ Contract, complete, and publicize project

9. Amphitheater

An outdoor amphitheater would be a splendid facility for Waltham. With the Charles River as a backdrop, theatrical events and musical performances would be magical, as they are at the Hatch Shell on Boston's Esplanade. With Waltham's noted private theatrical troupes, plus those of the city's colleges and high school, the amphitheater would conceivably find plenty of use. Possible sites for the facility include the former "Nuttings-on-the-Charles" site at the Prospect Street bridge, Forest Grove Park, and perhaps Brandeis University property in the Lakes District.

Action Steps:

- ✂ Develop committee of stakeholders and interested citizens to study project specifications and possible sites; create organizational structure for on-going facility management
- ✂ Research funding sources and acquire design funding
- ✂ Obtain easements and permits; RFP for design
- ✂ Design amphitheater and produce construction bid documents
- ✂ Secure construction funding
- ✂ Develop RFPs for construction
- ✂ Secure necessary approvals and permits

☞ Contract, complete, and publicize project

B. Recreation Ideas

In addition to boating and cycling, detailed in the infrastructure section above, a number of recreation ideas emerged during our community charrette meetings. The ideas do not necessarily require capital expenditure on infrastructure improvements, but they will require organization and volunteer effort to become reality.

1. Model Boating**

In some communities, radio-controlled model boating is a serious hobby for all ages. Each week on Redd's Pond in Marblehead, for instance, groups of model boaters gather in miniature regattas, attracting many interested onlookers as well. Some are sailboats, with radio controls operating the trim of the sails. Some are motorboats, with remote-controlled steering and speed. Model boat clubs serve hobbyists with inspiration, instruction, and mentoring.

The Moody Street Bridge area on the Charles River would be a wonderful area for model boat activities, with plenty of broad river access along Cronin's Landing and Riverfront Park for hobbyists and spectators alike (care will have to be taken for on-going riverbank protection). Above the Moody Street dam, the water is fairly placid and free of obstructions, so model boats have relatively smooth sailing (if the boat rental idea at that location comes to fruition, the sailing might not be quite as smooth!). The Charles River Museum of Industry has in the past hosted scale model steamboat events in this area with great success.

We recommend formation of a model boat club in Waltham to stimulate interest in this activity along the Charles River. Perhaps the club could be an offshoot of an existing organization such as scouts, senior center (with a mentoring program for youth), faith organization, or YMCA. Once the group is up and running, their regattas should be publicized through the local papers and through the promotional activities of the Waltham Tourism Council and Waltham West Suburban Chamber of Commerce. The Construction Zone, a retail toy store on Moody Street near the bridge, might be a good corporate partner in these endeavors.

Action Steps:

☞ Research existing Waltham model boat hobbyists and organizations that may serve to formalize the group. Find a leader to spearhead the effort.

- ✂ Recruit additional model boaters; schedule regattas along Charles River
- ✂ Secure necessary approvals and permits
- ✂ Hold and publicize regattas

2. Fishing Tournaments**

Fishing continues to be one of the most popular outdoor activities, and it holds multigenerational appeal. Although the sport is by nature a solitary one, fishing tournaments are a way to raise interest by way of friendly competition. In Waltham, a tournament would highlight the return of the water's health and would raise awareness of the recreational opportunities along the Charles. A kid's tournament would help raise interest among the younger generation and families. Ice fishing in the Lakes District could provide the basis for a winter-season tournament. Organization of the tournaments would fall to the MDC, but cooperation should be solicited from Waltham Parks & Recreation and area anglers.

Action Steps:

- ✂ MDC schedule tournament and solicit participation of angling groups and Waltham Parks & Recreation.
- ✂ Pre-publicize tournament
- ✂ Hold and publicize tournament

3. Private/Spiritual

Rivers often play a role in religion and spirituality, and the Charles River in Waltham indeed can be inspirational. One idea that emerged in our charrette meetings was to encourage the use of the Charles River and Riverwalk for private spiritual activities. Such activities might be simple, such as enjoying solitude during a walk or jog, a family bike ride, or practicing yoga on the riverbank. There also might be a place for group activities such as baptisms, weddings, bar mitzvahs, and similar events (these activities are allowed along the MDC Riverwalk with a special use permit) . Action steps for this idea would be contingent on the individual or group engaging in the activity and the policies of the property owner on whose land the activity is to take place.

4. Cross-Country Skiing/Snowshoeing

Possible cold-weather activities along the Charles include cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. The MDC maintains a “no-shovel” policy on the Riverwalk, which creates a scenic winter wonderland during periods of snow. These opportunities should be publicized in the “Charles River Recreation Guidebook” which we recommend elsewhere in this plan.

5. Educational Opportunities

The Charles River in Waltham holds great potential for educational field trips that use the river to teach the area’s cultural, industrial, and natural history. We recommend the community, led by the Waltham School System, develop a curriculum centered on the river, and publicize the curriculum to teachers within and outside Waltham. The MV Totem Pole, which has offered river cruises to school groups in the past, should be enlisted as a participant in the effort.

Action Steps:

- ✂ Convene a “curriculum development committee” comprised of the Waltham School System, historians, ecologists, MV Totem Pole, and other parties
- ✂ Create curriculum and publicize to educators in Waltham and beyond

C. Event Ideas

Well-organized, compelling events can work wonders in building awareness, attracting visitation, boosting community spirit, providing economic benefit, and fostering a climate of cooperation for those involved in organizing the event. The Charles River and Riverwalk comprise an ideal venue for special events in Waltham.

We recognize how an annual event like the Lowell Folk Festival provides major benefits to an industrial city. The weekend event attracts more than 60,000 people from throughout the U.S., and has helped shape Lowell’s distinct identity as a destination. Likewise, Riverfest has been a major event in Cambridge for more than 20 years, and has contributed much to the identity of the city and awareness of the Charles River.

The unique “WaterFire” events in Providence, Rhode Island, should be of particular interest to Waltham. WaterFire is an award-winning fire sculpture installation on the three rivers in downtown Providence, an indescribable work of art and symbol of Providence's renaissance. Each WaterFire event

(there are 18 scheduled for 2002) features 100 bonfires that blaze just above the surface of the water in metal braziers. The string of fires illuminates nearly two-thirds of a mile of urban public spaces and parks, and residents and visitors gather to stroll along the river while listening to a selection of classical and world music that plays through a speaker system. The fires are tended from sunset to past midnight by black-clad performers in boats who pass quietly before the flames. There is no admission fee to WaterFire, and more than 3 million residents and visitors have attended WaterFire events since its creation in 1994. Each WaterFire event is sponsored by a corporation, group, or public agency; selected lightings this year were accompanied by dancing at the Sovereign Bank outdoor ballroom and concerts at the Verizon Jazz Stage.

We recommend Waltham keep in mind these examples as it plans events around the Charles River. We believe the configuration of the river in Waltham, coupled with the exceptional viewing areas along Riverwalk Park, Moody Street Bridge, and public riverwalk near Cronin's Landing, provide Waltham with the basis for producing events that celebrate the Charles River in grand fashion.

1. Waltham Floating Stage Events**

Waltham has an excellent opportunity to create a unique, “signature” event that, like WaterFire in Providence, brings the city visitors, widespread acclaim, and civic pride.

We recommend the community develop the “Waltham Floating Stage,” a series of theatrical and musical events held each summer in the Charles River. Floating docks would be anchored in the Moody Street Bridge basin, providing the basis for a stage (or groups of multiple stages) that supports “in the round” productions. Performers could be shuttled between shore and stage in decorated watercraft, adding to the excitement of the performance.

Spectators would be encouraged to bring blankets or chairs, and sit along the banks of Riverwalk Park or the Public Riverwalk near Cronin’s Landing. Standing room might be available along the sidewalk of Moody Street Bridge. Ciro’s restaurant at Cronin’s Landing would be an excellent place for “dinner theater” packages on the nights of performance. Boaters could anchor in a specially-designated area upstream to view the performances.

As in Providence during WaterFire, we would anticipate foodservice being available in Riverwalk Park through vendor carts, operated by some of Waltham’s restaurants. These and other

vendors, perhaps selling binoculars, programs, souvenirs, and other items, would add to the festivity of the events.

Performance possibilities are limitless, given Waltham's talent base. An annual schedule could feature theatrical performances from Reagle Players, Hovey Players, and drama departments of Brandeis, Bentley, and Waltham High School. Musical performances of jazz, "pops" classical, light opera, rock/R&B, ethnic, and world music would be appropriate as well, using local and "name" artists. The event series also might include classic movies shown on a big screen constructed temporarily on the floating stage.

The logistics of the "Waltham Floating Stage" would be more challenging than ordinary land-based productions. However, the "payoff" of creating a unique, evocative signature event for Waltham would be well worth the effort. We are told that the Charles River Museum of Industry currently owns six floating docks which, lashed together, would create a stage measuring 36 feet by 48 feet. The Museum has offered to loan the docks for the project.

The "Waltham Floating Stage" should be free of charge -- admission would be impossible to collect, and free admission would expose a much wider group of spectators to the arts and to the Charles River. Productions and operating costs could be offset by sponsorships, grants, concession sales, advertising sales (in a program book), private donations, and in-kind contributions.

Action Steps:

- ✂ Develop "Waltham Floating Stage" committee to determine feasibility
- ✂ Research funding sources and acquire start-up funding
- ✂ If necessary, file non-profit corporation papers
- ✂ Develop schedule for first year performances
- ✂ Solicit sponsorships, grants, and other funding for first year performances
- ✂ Obtain easements and permits
- ✂ Pre-publicity of first-year schedule
- ✂ Implement first-year schedule
- ✂ Develop schedule & funding for year two and beyond

2. Ethnic Festival**

We encourage development of a Ethnic Heritage Festival along the Charles River, celebrating Waltham's outstanding ethnic heritage (48 languages are reported to be spoken by students and staff of

Waltham High School). Located along the pathway of Riverwalk Park and/or public riverwalk near Cronin's Landing, the festival would be centered around booths featuring traditional arts & crafts, food, music, and culture of Waltham's ethnic groups. The "Floating Stage" could feature concert performances. There may also be a programmatic tie-in with Waltham's office of the National Archives and Records Administration, which holds the Northeast's historic immigration records. It may be desirable to have the festival coincide with "Historic Waltham Days," a series of events which customarily occur each year in June. The river would be an appropriate venue for historic reenactments of Native American camps and commemoration of Waltham's ethnic factory workers.

Action Steps:

- ✧ Develop Ethnic Heritage Festival committee to determine feasibility
- ✧ Research funding sources and acquire start-up funding
- ✧ Solicit participation of ethnic heritage groups (via neighborhoods, community centers, houses of worship, etc.)
- ✧ Schedule festival
- ✧ Solicit sponsorships, grants, and other funding for first year festival
- ✧ Obtain easements and permits
- ✧ Pre-publicity of first-year festival
- ✧ Implement first-year festival
- ✧ Develop schedule & funding for year two and beyond

3. Fireworks**

Fireworks over the water is a breathtaking sight -- witness the popularity of the July 4 pyrotechnics on the Esplanade in Boston. Waltham should consider holding seasonal fireworks displays near the Moody Street Bridge basin, where spectators can view the show from both banks. Perhaps, with the "Floating Stage" in operation, the fireworks can be combined with a concert reminiscent of the Esplanade festivities.

Action Steps:

- ✧ MDC and City of Waltham determine feasibility of fireworks on the Charles
- ✧ Acquire funding
- ✧ Contract with fireworks vendors
- ✧ Obtain easements and permits
- ✧ Implement and publicize fireworks.

4. Athletic Events

The “Run of the Charles” is an annual canoe and kayak race, now in its 20th year, organized by the Charles River Watershed Association. Held in April, the 2002 race attracted almost 1,600 paddlers who competed in several classes of competition, including a professional class that attracts some of the best canoe/kayak racers in the North America.

Several categories of racers pass through Waltham on their way from Dedham to Boston, creating an excellent opportunity for viewing the action from the Moody Street Bridge basin and other vantage points. The event is similar to the Boston Marathon in that large numbers of competitors pass through multiple towns toward the finish line in Boston. Perhaps Waltham can offer spectators food service, entertainment, and hospitality tents to ward off the unpredictable April weather.

Another athletic event that would highlight the Charles River would be a swim/bike/running triathlon, in which all three events are staged in the river or on the Riverwalk between Waltham and Boston.

Action Steps:

- ✧ MDC and City of Waltham determine feasibility of a Riverwalk Park festival/viewing area during the “Run of the Charles” event
- ✧ Develop committee to determine feasibility of a Charles River Triathlon

5. Embassy Roof Events

The roof deck of the Embassy parking garage, which overlooks Moody Street dam, has potential as an interesting open-air event venue. It has a central location in downtown Waltham, and a view of the Charles River, albeit partially obstructed by trees, and (obviously) plenty of parking. Add cabaret tables, a portable bandstand, and decorative lights, and the Embassy Roof would become an outdoor jazz club or dance pavilion. City officials tell us that the parking area (though not the rooftop) has hosted small events successfully in the past.

Action Steps:

- ✂ City of Waltham (owner of Embassy garage) determine feasibility of Embassy rooftop events
- ✂ Develop committee to plan and organize events
- ✂ Schedule events; book entertainers
- ✂ Publicize and implement events

6. Earth Day

Boston's Earth Day celebration concert is held on the Esplanade each May, and has become a noted event. Waltham should consider hosting an Earth Day celebration along the Charles (at the amphitheater or "floating stage" recommended above). In addition to a concert, the festivities should include environmental education and activism, such as an Earth Day river cleanup. Waltham Earth Day events are currently held at Prospect Hill Park, and were formerly held in Waltham Common; we believe siting the events on the Charles River might add to attendance and participation.

Action Steps:

- ✂ Charles River stakeholders work with Waltham Earth Day Committee to discuss Earth Day events along the Charles
- ✂ Research and secure event funding
- ✂ Obtain easements and permits
- ✂ Book entertainment
- ✂ Publicize and implement event

7. Winter Light Show

Many of the events we have recommended would occur during fair weather months, but the Charles River has appeal in all seasons. To encourage use of the Riverwalk in the winter, we suggest the creation of a "winter lights" display. Some cities have become known for their elaborate displays (Chicopee, Massachusetts, and Peoria, Illinois, to name two) which feature fanciful light sculptures depicting everything from animated ski jumpers to Star Trek's USS Enterprise, created by various community groups. Waltham could use the Charles River to its best advantage in such an endeavor as well. Following on the "floating stage" idea, we suggest installing light sculptures not along the river but in the river, from the Lakes District to the Farwell Street bridge downstream. Spectators would be encouraged to travel the length of the Riverwalk in Waltham to see the entire "parade" of light.

Action Steps:

- ✂ Develop committee to plan winter “parade of light”
- ✂ Research and secure event funding
- ✂ Solicit community groups to construct light sculptures
- ✂ Obtain easements and permits; arrange for security details along Riverwalk
- ✂ Arrange foodservice and concessions
- ✂ Publicize and implement event

VI. IMPLEMENTATION

Perhaps the hardest part of any strategic plan is to bring things “back to Earth,” to separate fantasy from reality, to bring the vision to fruition. In the implementation section that follows, we examine a way to organize Charles River stakeholder groups behind a common strategy. We then discuss communications methods, identify the audiences that need to be kept “in the loop” as we implement our ideas, and, finally, give a brief synopsis of possible funding sources that will make it all happen.

A. Organization & Partnerships

There are many agencies and organizations with a direct, peripheral, or potential interest in the Charles River in Waltham.

Local

- Mayor’s office
- City Council
- Planning Department
- Parks & Recreation Department
- Conservation Commission
- Waltham Land Trust
- Waltham Tourism Council
- Waltham Historical Commission
- Historic Waltham, Inc.
- Charles River Museum of Industry
- Waltham West Suburban Chamber of Commerce

- 128 Business Council
- Waltham Alliance to Create Housing (WATCH), Waltham's community development corporation
- School Committee
- Council on Aging
- Handicap Commission
- Neighborhood associations
- Local scouting and youth groups
- Private businesses (M.V. Totem Pole, Charles River Canoe & Kayak, real estate developers)
- Educational institutions (Brandeis, Bentley, Waltham High School)
- Arts & theatrical organizations

State/Regional

- Metropolitan District Commission (MDC)
- Charles River Watershed Association
- Charles River Conservancy
- Mass. Water Resources Authority (MWRA)
- Massachusetts Legislators
- Governor's office
- Mass. Office of Environmental Affairs
 - Riverways Programs
 - Charles River Watershed Team
 - Department of Environmental Protection
- Mass. Department of Economic Development
 - Office of Travel & Tourism
- Metropolitan Area Planning Commission
- Mass. Historical Commission

Federal

- Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Senators and Representatives
- National Park Service
- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- National Endowment for the Humanities
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Each of these groups has a different reason for its interest in the Charles River in Waltham, be it environmental, recreational, economic, or cultural. From a strategic planning standpoint, our challenge is to create a cohesive way to unite the stakeholders behind a comprehensive vision of the river. Implementation of the ideas contained in this plan, many of which are “multidisciplinary” and cross jurisdictional boundaries of regulating agencies and interest groups, requires the formation of a means of dialog between the stakeholders.

We propose, therefore, the creation of a “Partnership for the Charles River in Waltham,” a task-oriented affiliation of stakeholder groups that seeks broad-based community support, participation, and care of the Charles River in the city.

The Partnership, as we see it, could be an outgrowth of the community charrette meetings held to discuss this strategic plan. The Partnership would continue to discuss and refine a comprehensive vision for the Charles River, determine project priorities, and forge working committees to implement the projects. With some of the projects, implementation will fall to a single agency (i.e., the MDC); with other projects, the Partnership will need to devise a division of responsibility, create partnerships between standing groups, and help solicit volunteers to bring the projects to fruition.

We stress the phrase “task-oriented” as we discuss the Partnership: it is not our intention to add yet another formal organization to the mix. Rather, the group should be oriented toward accomplishing specific projects and keeping aloft the community’s vision for the Charles River. The Partnership should select leaders, including a chairperson, vice-chair, and secretary (to disseminate meeting notices and information). The group will not need a treasurer; fiscal responsibilities should be handled on a project-by-project basis and delegated to one of the existing entities that comprise the Partnership.

B. Communications Methods

One of the more important tasks before the Partnership is communicating the full environmental, recreational, and cultural importance of the Charles River. We recommend the following ways of communicating this message:

- Charles River Recreation Guidebook: the Partnership should create a small guidebook featuring all the recreational opportunities along the Charles in Waltham

including canoeing/kayaking, picnicking, walking, cycling, jogging, fishing, and wildlife spotting. The guidebook should contain detailed information relevant to each type of recreation (i.e., good fishing spots, portages for canoes/kayaks, etc.), as well as interesting historical facts about the area.

- **Riverwalk Tour Brochure:** building on the current MDC brochure/map of the Upper Charles River Reservation, the Partnership should create an easy-to-follow trail map of the Riverwalk in Waltham. The brochure should include “step-by-step” descriptions of points of interest, historical/cultural interpretation (i.e., details on the Waltham Watch Company, worker housing along Crescent Street, Boston Manufacturing Company, Bleachery, etc.), and brief recreational information. The brochure should also contain information on Waltham restaurants and visitor services.
- **Public Relations:** the Partnership should seek maximum publicity for virtually every project on which it works. Raising public awareness, use, and advocacy of the Charles River is a long-term process which requires continual positive messages in the media. Each initiative (including the adoption of this strategic plan and formation of the Partnership) should be greeted with media exposure which focuses on the on-going improvement of the Charles. The Partnership should also remember to ask its constituent members to include the information in their respective newsletters and communications efforts. For example, information about this strategic plan should be distributed through City of Waltham communications vehicles, Waltham Land Trust newsletter, Charles River Museum of Industry member newsletter, school department, and so on.
- **Direct Mail:** as it implements special events, the Partnership should utilize direct mail to its core audience, Waltham residents, to publicize the events and encourage attendance. Direct mail can be done economically if the Partnership enlists the City of Waltham to include a notice in its communications with residents.
- **Advertising:** advertising will be an essential component of promoting special events along the Charles River. As advertising in newspapers, TV, or radio can be expensive, we recommend the Partnership develop a strong relationship with the Waltham Daily News Tribune, local cable station, and area radio stations (especially Waltham’s WCRB, a classical music station with strong listenership throughout Greater Boston

and a demographic that should be strong advocates of the Charles River).

Advertising at the Embassy movie theater and aboard the MBTA Commuter Rail (Fitchburg line running through Waltham) should also be explored. Media frequently receive sponsorship visibility at public events in exchange for advertising, and the Partnership should make use of this tactic.

- **Electronic Communications:** use of the Web and e-mail for promotional communications has become a proven tool in the last few years. As it produces special events and programming, the Partnership should utilize both to get the word out. If feasible, the Partnership may wish to develop a specific Web site dedicated to its work on the Charles River in Waltham. This, however, will require organizational diligence and funding to maintain an on-going Web site. Alternatively, the Partnership could solicit one or more of its constituent members to post event and activity information on their respective Web sites (i.e., a Riverwalk tour map or event schedule for the “Waltham Floating Stage” on the Web sites of the Charles River Watershed Association, the Waltham Tourism Council, City of Waltham, MDC, etc.). The Partnership should also build an “opt-in” e-mail list -- a list of addresses of people who request regular communications about the Charles River. The Partnership can then send pertinent information to its core audience quickly, efficiently, and inexpensively.

C. Audiences

Where should the Partnership be directing its communications efforts? Several target audiences emerged from our community charrette discussions.

- **Waltham Residents:** the consensus of our community meetings was that Waltham’s 58,000 residents are the key audience for the suggestions outlined in this strategic plan. It is essential to reshape the way residents perceive the Charles River if the Charles is once again to gain center stage in the community’s recreational and cultural life. As community support for the Charles builds, its long-term health and stability will be assured.
- **Commuters/Employees/Students:** Waltham’s population essentially doubles each day with an estimated 60,000 employees who work in in the city’s vibrant business community. Add to that the non-resident student population from Brandeis and

Bentley, and this audience of non-residents who have regular contact with Waltham is very large indeed. They, too, have a significant potential interest in opportunities along the Charles River (especially institutions such as Brandeis and employers such as Nova Biomedical which are located along the Charles).

- **Visitors:** Waltham now has one of the state's largest concentrations of hotels outside of Boston: nine hotels (ten by the end of this year) offering 1,600 rooms. Many of the overnight guests are business-related, many are extended-stay. Recreation is very important to these visitors, especially extended-stay visitors with free time away from home. Increasingly, leisure travelers are selecting Waltham's hotels because of their proximity to Boston, Lexington, Concord, and other popular tourist attractions (the Waltham Tourism Council promotes the city as the "Gateway to History"). The Partnership should make the visitor market one of its target audiences. Brochures, guidebooks, and other information should be distributed through the hotels. Hotel desk staff and concierges, frequently asked by guests for touring suggestions, should be thoroughly acquainted with all the Charles River has to offer.
- **Special Interest Audiences:** ardent canoeists, kayakers, anglers, cyclists, and environmentalists will continue to be one of the Partnerships core constituencies and target audiences. The Partnership should keep these groups aware of events and opportunities along the Charles, and should seek to make them "ambassadors" for the resource, helping spread the word to others sharing their interests.

D. Possible Funding Sources

Ideas are easy. Funding is the tricky part. Here are some possible funding sources for the ideas we've suggested in this plan.

- **MDC:** the MDC has primary jurisdiction over the Charles River, Riverwalk, and much of the land bordering the Charles in Waltham. The Partnership should work closely with the MDC (which will hopefully be a vital constituent member of the Partnership) to seek project funding in future state budgets.
- **Other state funding:** as we identified above, many governmental agencies have a direct or peripheral interest in the Charles River in Waltham, and many are potential

funding sources for certain projects. The Mass. Office of Travel & Tourism has a regional grant program (Waltham is within the jurisdiction of the Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau) for which Waltham's special events may qualify. The Massachusetts Tourism Facilities Fund could provide capital assistance with construction of tourism-related facilities such as a "recreation hub" or visitor center. The Massachusetts Turnpike Authority has a tourism grant program to communities along the Pike; some of the tourism-related projects identified in this plan would qualify for Pike grant funding. The Massachusetts Cultural Council and Mass. Council for the Humanities offer funding for arts and cultural projects; the "Waltham Floating Stage" and Ethnic Heritage Festival would be appropriate applicants. The Massachusetts Riverways Programs, which funded this strategic plan through a grant to the City of Waltham, could also be a funder of future initiatives relating to the River, as could the Department of Environmental Management, Department of Environmental Protection, Mass. Environmental Trust, and the Department of Housing and Community Development. (A more complete listing of possible state funding sources is included at the end of this report.) Waltham's state senator and representatives should be kept abreast of the Partnership's initiatives and should act as advocates relative to any state funding discussions.

- **Sponsorships/Private Funding:** events which attract large numbers of people, or smaller numbers of people meeting a particular criteria, are often eligible for sponsorship funding from corporations, foundations, and private donors. As it develops events such as the "Waltham Floating Stage" which could achieve a high degree of popularity, the Partnership should have an active sponsorship program to offset costs. Likewise, capital projects can also attract private sponsorship funding, especially if there are "naming rights" opportunities. There are many commercial abutters to the river which may be excellent potential community partners: Nova Biomedical, Boston Scientific, Boston Edison, Cronin's Landing, Stop & Shop, and others.
- **City Funding:** the City of Waltham has a vested interest in the vitality of the Charles River as part of the city's cultural fabric. The Partnership should work closely with the Mayor's office and City Council (both of which should be constituent members of the Partnership) to discuss the use of city funds toward river-related projects.

- Federal Funding: it is important for the Partnership to “leave no stone unturned” when brainstorming federal sources. Environmental funding comes through the EPA. The Partnership should also look to the National Endowment for the Humanities, National Endowment for the Arts, National Trust for Historic Preservation, and National Park Service for possible funding and “technical assistance.”

SOURCES

Waltham Rediscovered, An Ethnic History of Waltham, Massachusetts, Kristin A. Petersen, Thomas J. Murphy; Peter E. Randall Publisher, 1988

The Upper Charles River Reservation Master Plan, Metropolitan District Commission, Carol R. Johnson Associates, Inc., Master Plan Consultants, 1998

The Charles River, Waltham, John Wacker & Associates for Waltham Conservation Commission, 1974

Open Space and Recreation Plan, Waltham Planning Department, 2000

Tourism Strategic Plan for Waltham, Yaeger Communications, 2001

Charles River Watershed Association, Web site, 2002

Watershed Action Plan, Ten Mile River Watershed Team, 2002

**Summary of Potential Funding Sources from State Agencies for Environmental Projects
(Excerpted from Watershed Action Plan, Ten Mile River Watershed Team, 2002)**

Watershed Stewardship Program

Executive Office of Environmental Affairs

Contact: John Clarkeson, 617-626-1159, john.clarkeson@state.ma.us

Up to \$50,000 in matching grants for river restoration, research, environmental improvements, or recreational improvements.

Volunteer Monitoring Grants

Executive Office of Environmental Affairs

Contact: John Clarkeson, 617-626-1159, john.clarkeson@state.ma.us or Christian Krahforst, 617-626-1216, christian.krahforst@state.ma.us

Up to \$5,000 to support volunteer groups which monitor inland and coastal systems.

Communities Connected by Water Program

Executive Office of Environmental Affairs

Contact: John Clarkeson, 617-626-1159, john.clarkeson@state.ma.us

Up to \$150,000 for projects that protect watershed resources and plan for sustainable growth.

Outdoor Classroom Program

Executive Office of Environmental Affairs

Contact: Melissa Griffiths, 617-626-1114

Up to \$1,500 for promoting watershed and environmental education in the classroom.

Planning for Growth Grants

Executive Office of Environmental Affairs

Contact: Kurt Gaertner, 617-626-1154

Up to \$100,000 for comprehensive growth planning for cities and towns and development of regional policy plans.

GROWetlands Grant Program

Wetlands Restoration and Banking Program

Contact: Christy Foote-Smith, 617-292-5991

\$100,000 in total program funds for “proactive” wetlands restoration projects.

Corporate Wetlands Restoration Program

Wetlands Restoration and Banking Program

Contact: Christy Foote-Smith, 617-292-5991

Program funded through a public/private partnership for wetland restoration projects.

Self-Help Program

Division of Conservation Services

Contact: Jennifer Soper, 617-626-1015

Reimbursement grant funds for acquiring land for conservation and passive recreation purposes.

Urban Self-Help Program

Division of Conservation Services

Contact: Joan Robes, 617-626-1014

Reimbursement grant funds for acquiring land for public outdoor recreation and/or the renovation or development of public outdoor parks and recreation facilities.

Environmental Grants

Massachusetts Environmental Trust

Contact: Robbin Peach, 617-727-0249

The Trust funds projects that encourage cooperative efforts to raise environmental awareness and support innovative approaches to natural resource protection.

Coastal Pollutant Remediation Program (CPR)

Office of Coastal Zone Management

Contact: Jason Burtner, 617-626-1214

Funds to coastal zone municipalities for stormwater pollution and vessel pump-out.

Lake and Pond Grant Program

Department of Environmental Management

Contact: Steve Asen, 617-626-1353

Up to \$10,000 for lake and pond protection, preservation, enhancement, and public access.

Recreational Trails Program

Department of Environmental Management

Contact: Peter Brandenburg, 617-626-1453

Up to \$20,000 for construction and improvement of publicly accessible recreational trails.

Greenways and Trails Demonstration Grants

Department of Environmental Management

Contact: Jennifer Howard, 413-586-8706x18, jennifer.howard@state.ma.us

Up to \$10,000 for creation and promotion of greenway and trail networks.

Urban Forest Planning and Education Grants

Department of Environmental Management

Contact: Phillip Rodbell, 617-626-1466

Up to \$10,000 in funds to build support for the protection and management of community trees and forest ecosystems.

Heritage Tree Care

Department of Environmental Management

Contact: Edith Marka, 617-626-1466

Funds for pruning and maintenance of large or historic public trees.

Mass ReLeaf Program

Department of Environmental Management

Contact: Edith Marka, 617-626-1466

Up to \$5,000 to purchase trees for community planting projects.

Forest Stewardship Program

Department of Environmental Management

Contact: Edith Marka, 617-626-1466

Grants to private forest landowners to protect forest ecosystems.

Massachusetts Historic Landscape Preservation Grant Program

Department of Environmental Management

Contact: Katy Lacy, 617-626-1379, katy.lacy@state.ma.us

Up to \$50,000 per year to support the preservation and restoration of historic landscapes listed on National Register of Historic Places.

Nonpoint Source Pollution Grants

Department of Environmental Protection

Contact: Beth McCann, 617-292-5901

Up to \$200,000 to control nonpoint sources of water pollution.

Massachusetts Clean Water State Revolving Fund Program

Department of Environmental Protection

Contact: Steven McCurdy, 617-292-5779

Funds to assist communities to comply with federal and state water quality requirements.

Massachusetts Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Program

Department of Environmental Protection

Contact: Steven McCurdy, 617-292-5779

Funds to assist communities to comply with Safe Drinking Water Act requirements.

Water Quality Management Planning Grants

Department of Environmental Protection

Contact: Gary Gonyea, 617-556-1152

Up to \$60,000 for water quality assessment and management planning.

Watershed Project Financing and Construction

Department of Environmental Protection

Contact: Alan Slater, 617-292-5749

Revolving loan program for municipalities to fund design and construction of watershed improvement projects.

Municipal Recycling Grant Program

Department of Environmental Protection

Contact: Brooke Nash, 617-292-5984

Funds for recycling equipment, educational materials, and technical assistance.

Municipal Recycling Incentive Program

Department of Environmental Protection

Contact: Brooke Nash, 617-292-5984

Performance-based grant that awards a per-ton payment for primary recyclables collected through municipal programs.

Urban Rivers Small Grants

Department of Fisheries, Wildlife, and Environmental Law Enforcement

Contact: Maria Van Dusen, 617-626-1540

Up to \$8,000 for projects that seek to restore urban rivers.

Clean Vessel Act Grants

Department of Fisheries, Wildlife, and Environmental Law Enforcement

Contact: Buell Hollister, 617-626-1524

Funds for boat pump-out facilities and dump stations for the proper disposal of sewage from recreational boats.

Transportation Enhancement Funds

Massachusetts Highway Department

Contact: Linda Walsh, 617-973-8052

Funds for environmental remediation of transportation impacts and transportation improvements including pedestrian and bicycle pathways.

Municipal Incentive Grant Program

Department of Housing and Community Development

Contact: Don Martin, 617-727-7001x404

Up to \$60,000 for municipal/regional assistance in the planning, management, and operation of cities and towns.

Community Development Action Grant Program

Department of Housing and Community Development

Contact: Carol Harper, 617-727-7001x483

Up to \$1 million for infrastructure projects promoting economic development.

Grant Program for the Demolition of Abandoned Buildings

Department of Housing and Community Development

Contact: Marilyn Contreas, 617-727-7001x408

Grants to demolish abandoned buildings which are posing severe health and safety risks.